Korean deal a threat

Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s announcement, in South Korea, of a free trade agreement between Canada and South Korea poses a serious threat to Canadian job security, says Unifor National President Jerry Dias.

“The problem is that Prime Minister Harper did not address the current trade imbalance,” Dias said. The current auto trade imbalance is $2.6 billion, which is expected to increase under this deal.

According to a Unifor analysis, the deal extends to South Korea many of the investor and government procurement rights already in NAFTA.

Unifor has endorsed a call for a task force to monitor the deal’s impact.

Canadian negotiators were unable to win the same protections to those the U.S. negotiated in its deal with South Korea.

The US deal included protections against import

Sustainable energy endorsed

Delegates to Unifor’s inaugural Prairie Regional Council endorsed a sustainable energy strategy for Canada that includes a commitment to limiting greenhouse gas emissions and a prohibition of raw bitumen exports in favour of domestic upgrading and processing.

Unifor women participated in International Women’s Day events across Canada, and sponsored a report that found women face a particularly difficult time in today’s precarious job market.

Auto strategy needed

The decision by Chrysler to withdraw its request for financial assistance from the federal and provincial governments as part of its proposals to invest in its assembly plants in Brampton and Windsor is regrettable, Unifor National President Jerry Dias says.

Here’s a selection of tweets about @UniforTheUnion

@JeffCasey2
Auto industry safeguards sought by Ontario missing from Canada-South Korea trade pact: #canlab #unifor #cdnpoli

@solidaritysis
Celebrating #IWD with @UniforWomen @PeggyNashNDP @judyrebrick + many, many amazing #women We celebrate + re-commit to work remaining #unifor
Vancouver 
port action

A failure by the port of 
Metro Vancouver and 
various employers to 
meet past commitments 
on rate enforcement has 
pushed more than one 
thousand container truck 
drivers off the job.

After a lengthy dispute 
in 2005, truckers won 
what’s known as the 
“Ready Rates” of pay: a 
minimum below which 
companies couldn’t 
charge for moving 
containers.

But without sector-
wide enforcement, 
companies continue to 
under-cut the Ready 
Rates, eating into truck 
drivers’ take home pay.

“Container truckers are 
tired of lip-service and 
demand real changes and 
real solutions,” said Paul 
Johal, President of Unifor-
Vancouver Container 
Truck Drivers (VCTA).

Line-ups at the ports 
are another major issue 
for the truck drivers. 
Often paid by the 
container, sitting in line-
ups waiting for their cargo 
to be processed costs 
them money.

Unifor is the largest 
union representing truckers at the port. On 
March 1, Unifor members 
voted 100 per cent in 
favour of a strike and 
initiated job action on 
March 6.

More than 300 Unifor-
VCTA truck drivers are on 
picket lines. The 
remaining drivers are not 
unionized.

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Photo spotlight

Registered Practical Nurses from 
across Ontario went to Queen’s Park to lobby MPPs.

Workers at MTS in Manitoba wore Unifor 
T-shirts to support their bargaining team.

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RPNs go to Legislature

Nearly 30 Registered 
Practical Nurses from 
across Ontario, members of 
Unifor, went to the Ontario 
Legislature to talk to 
members of the provincial 
parliament about their 
concerns about health care 
in the province and the role 
of their profession.

“Registered Practical 
Nurses are on the front line 
of our health care system. 
For many patients, and for 
thousands in long term 
care, they are the face of 
health care in Ontario,” said 
Katha Fortier, Unifor’s 
Ontario Regional Director 
and an RPN.

The RPNs pushed for full 
utilization in Ontario’s 
health care system. During 
the lobby sessions, the 
RPNs stressed with MPPs 
the vital role they play in 
Ontario’s health care 
system, and how to build 
on that through further 
education and training.

The nurses also called 
for the elimination of 
barriers to RPNs putting 
their full range of skills to 
use, and a greater voice for 
RPNs in the administration 
of hospitals and long term 
care facilities.

RPNs are the fastest-
growing job category in the 
health care system, with 
almost 43,000 working 
across the province today, 
compared with some 
33,000 in 2009.

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Families of missing women need support

Despite First Nations 
people being only about 4 
per cent of the population, 
they make up a quarter of 
the missing and murdered 
women in Canada, Unifor’s 
Prairie Regional Council 
heard.

And yet, the families 
typically have trouble 
getting police to take their 
cases seriously, Candice 
Neuman of Ka Ni Kanichihk 
said in a moving address to 
the council.

“I have a family I am 
working with right now. 
Their daughter has been 
missing since September 
and the police will not let 
them file a missing person’s 
report because they have 
reports of sightings,” she 
said.

Ka Ni Kanichihk works 
with families to help them 
cope with their loss.

Neuman said her first 
experience with the issue of 
missing and murdered 
Aboriginal women in 
Canada came when she 
was growing up in 
Winnipeg and a girl with 
the same name was found 
killed.

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UNIFOR COMMUNICATIONS

SARAH BLACKSTOCK, KATIE ARNUP, IAN BOYKO, SHELLEY BURGOYNE, SHANNON DEVINE AND STUART LAIDLAW

www.Unifor.org | @UniforTheUnion
surges into the US market and a ground-breaking “snap-back” provision enabling the US government to return tariffs to pre-agreement levels if Korean non-tariff barriers limit US exports. Even with these provisions, the US has suffered a worsening auto trade deficit.

“We expected our political leadership to stand up for the rights, jobs and economic security of Canadians - and they have failed to do that,” said Dias. Resource sectors such as forestry are among the Unifor-represented sectors that may benefit.

For Unifor’s Briefing Kit and Fact Sheet on South Korea, go to: http://www.unifor.org/en/search/content/korea.

“Workers in this industry want stable jobs, and they know that means sustainable business practices that respect the environment,” said Angela Adams, secretary-treasurer of Unifor Local 707A in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

“It is also vital that our resources be processed in Canada, instead of seeing the jobs exported along with the bitumen,” said Adams, who is also Energy Sector chair.

Like Adams, many council delegates came to the Winnipeg meeting from locals in the oil and gas industry. The move comes just a few weeks after Unifor’s British Columbia Regional Council also endorsed a national energy and environment strategy that calls for Canadian oil to be used for Canadian needs, while protecting the environment, introducing strict limits on greenhouse gas emissions and respect for First Nations rights. The strategy also calls for a moratorium on “fracking” extraction of gas until safety, environmental, and First Nations’ concerns are fully addressed.

Delegates to Prairie Council elected their executive and committees. For the complete list of those elected, see Page 4.

Did you know?

There are 40,100 Unifor members in the Prairies. The largest sectors are Resources with 11,600 members, Transportation with 8,400 and Communications with 7,600.

“Auto strategy needed” on page 1

“The bottom line is that the people of Ontario and our leaders need to understand the importance of developing a long-term strategy, including public investment, if we want to have a strong, competitive advanced manufacturing sector,” Dias said.

Dias said Unifor looks forward to meeting with the company about the future of its plants in Windsor and Brampton.

“We’re pleased that Chrysler has said it will invest in Windsor, and look forward to working with the company and the government to ensure the continued success of our auto manufacturing in that community,” Dias said.

“We are deeply concerned, however, that in the long-term we are going to lose an incredible opportunity to secure Ontario’s manufacturing industry well into the future,” Dias said.

“The need for provincial leadership and vision has never been clearer if we are going to build and maintain a strong economy in this province,” stressed Dias.

“Unifor is eager to continue our work to ensure the long-term success of our advanced auto manufacturing and will work with all players to achieve that goal,” Dias said.

“That is what our members need. That is what this province needs.”

Violence against Hong Kong journalist condemned

Staff at Ming Pao Daily Toronto and their union, Unifor, are horrified by the savage daylight stabbing of a respected Hong Kong journalist, seen by many as a leading advocate of press freedom and democracy.

“Attacks on members of the press in Hong Kong have been increasing,” said Jerry Dias, Unifor National President.

“We join a shocked and outraged global community in condemning the violence against Hong Kong journalists who believe in freedom of the press and its importance to democracy, and urge Hong Kong authorities to relentlessly pursue the perpetrators of these crimes,” Dias said.

Kevin Lau, former chief editor of Ming Pao Daily Hong Kong, was attacked by cleaver-wielding assailants in Hong Kong recently. Last month, Lau was fired and replaced by a Malaysian journalist considered more pro-Beijing.

“As Chinese-Canadian media workers, we understand the importance of a free and independent press. Such a brutal attack on our respected colleague is an attack on us all,” said Joseph Man Ho Kwok, chair of unionized workers at Ming Pao Toronto, one of Canada’s largest Chinese-language newspapers.
Prairie executive elected

Unifor Prairie Council elected its first executive and committees to the council recently.

Executive Board

Chair: Christy Best, Local 649.
Vice-Chair: Guy Desforges, Local 445.
Secretary-Treasurer: Chester Lagman, Local 2169.

Members at Large: Mark Armstrong, Local 468; Clayton Burkholder, Local 892; Steve Kelly, Local 707A; Suzanne King, Local 681; Dave Kuntz, Local 1S; Valerie Saliba, Local 4050.

Political Action Committee

Michelle Carter, Local 649-2; Darren Gibson, Local 144; Brian Lackey, Local 4534.

Health & Safety and Environment

Brent Charron, Local 144; Kim Conway, Local 707A; Dave Kindred, Local 1-5. The Council’s five equity-seeking committees were elected at caucus meetings of their peers:

Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender

Kevin Avey, Local 4534; Kelly Ries, Local 650; Krista Wagner, Local 649.

Aboriginal & Racialized Workers

Dean Carvey, Local 773; Turesh Harnaraine, Local 3007; Don Wren, Local 1S

Workers with Disabilities

Kevin Boutet, Local 2002; Mike Kapalka, Local 21A; Roger Taylor, Local 777.

Women’s Committee

Joyce Coleman (Local 3), Wilma Ellenburgh (Local 52A), Carmen LeDarney (Local 2169).

Young Worker’s Committee

Jesse Allaman (Local 3003), Jennifer Mestrovic (Local 468), Ashley Wright (Local 191).

Get active to fight inequity, Dias tells members

Inequity is one of the greatest problems facing Canada today, and can only be addressed with a strong union movement, Unifor National President Jerry Dias told the union’s inaugural Prairie Regional Council recently.

“The trade union movement is about raising the standard of living for everyone,” Dias said February 28. “And that means getting out and working in the community.”

The inequity is all around us, Dias said, from young people forced to take unpaid internships, to families struggling to get by on minimum wage, to seniors with inadequate pensions.

Across Canada, he said, 100,000 seniors rely on food banks. The Canada Pension Plan provides a maximum of about $12,000 a year, well below the poverty line, and only 30 per cent have a workplace pension, Dias said.

“Let’s think about who those seniors are. They are our parents, our grandparents and our neighbours,” Dias said.

Unifor is the best way to fight such inequity, Dias said, because we fight for the rights of all working people, not just our own members.

Dias urged delegates to be active in their communities, campaigning during elections, or even running for office, and speaking out on issues that affect the quality of life for the working class – whether members or not. Only by being active, he said, can change be made.

“We will never win justice with our silence.”

Delegates warned about attacks on election fairness

Member of Parliament Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre) came to the Prairie Regional Council, hosted at the Fort Garry Hotel in Martin’s riding, with a warning about what he has witnessed.

“The last election was determined using widespread fraud,” said Martin. “It is almost certain that the Conservative Party’s voter contact database was used. Draw your own conclusions.”

Martin lamented the American-style smear tactics and cheating that have crept into Canadian federal elections during Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s reign.

He said that Elections Canada has uncovered evidence of misleading “robocalls” from 240 ridings. Given the slim margin of victory for the Conservatives in the 2011 election, Martin said that Canada’s democracy is in tatters.

“Many of us have relatives who went to war to fight and die for democracy. That system is being eroded with cheating, and the new Elections Act amendments will only make matters worse,” he said.

Martin concluded by saying it is up to unions and other civil society organizations to unite the opposition to Harper.

Unifor is committed to active participation in elections, and to defending the principles of democracy and fairness.